

Tips for Parents and Schools

Talking With Children About School Violence

What You Can Do: Talk With Your Children

Schools are the safest place for children -- safer than the street, the mall, or even the home. According to the Justice Policy Institute, 99 percent of children's deaths occur away from school, after hours and during holidays. It's important that schools are safe havens for learning. **If your child asks questions about a shooting or other violent event in your area or elsewhere, consider the suggestions below:**

Provide reassurance and comfort and listen to the concerns expressed by your child. Ask them how they feel and answer their questions the best that you can.

Talking with younger children, ages 4-7

It is best to keep your answers as general and as reassuring as possible. Asking questions to get a sense of how much your child knows about an event, or whether it has made him or her fearful is a good place to start.

Tell them that you and their school are doing their best to keep children safe and that school is one of the safest places for kids.

Don't be afraid to show sympathy and concern for those who were hurt. Help your child with the names for feelings they may be experiencing -- sad, worried, angry, etc.

Talking with grade school children, ages 8-12

It is best to start with questions to get a sense of how your child feels about a situation. Give children the words they need to identify their emotions in response to media coverage of the shooting. It is OK to let your child see your strong feelings for the victims. Compassion is an essential quality in a well functioning human being.

Rumors abound whenever there is a shooting or other violent event at a school. Help your children distinguish between what is fact and what is, potentially, fiction. At the same time, let them know that there is no justification for this kind of violence.

Assure them that this is not likely to happen in your school. In fact, this kind of violence is not likely to occur at most schools. Kids need to be reassured that they are safe. Talk with them about things that you and your community are doing to keep schools safe.

Tell your child that if someone they know talks about violence or threatens violence to herself or others, that it is important to tell an adult they trust. Even at this age, children need to be encouraged to take the behavior of their peers seriously and report suggestions or threats of violence. Tell them that friends do tell.

Encourage your child to keep talking with you or other trusted adults about their concerns. Talking with children, listening to them, and respecting their opinions will help them feel comforted and reassured through difficult times.

Talking with teenagers

The best thing that we can do for our adolescent children is talk with them honestly about the shootings and about violence in America. And listen carefully to what they say back.

Teenagers like and need a lot of privacy, so they may not be willing to share many details of their personal lives. However, let them know you're available, and feel free to talk with them about your feelings concerning the shootings.

Stress that this is a life or death conversation. In spite of their natural tendencies to protect each other and respect privacy, teenagers need to know when they should break their silence and confide in an adult about another kid's behavior. In doing so, they're actually helping troubled kids get necessary assistance. Friends do tell.